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URBAN REVITALIZATION/BROWNFIELDS RECOMMENDATIONS

Abandoned commercial and industrial properties called "Brownfields" which dot the urban landscape are overwhelmingly concentrated in people of color, low-income, indigenous peoples, and otherwise marginalized communities. By their very nature, Brownfields are inseparable from issues of social inequity, racial discrimination and urban decay--specifically manifested in adverse land use decisions, housing discrimination, residential segregation, community disinvestment, infrastructure decay, lack of educational and employment opportunity, and other issues.

The existence of degraded and hazardous physical environments in people of color, low-income, indigenous peoples, and otherwise disenfranchised communities, is apparent and indisputable. The physical elements of such environments, in part or in whole, have contributed to human disease and illness, negative psycho-social impact, economic disincentive, infrastructure decay, and overall community disintegration. Brownfields are merely one aspect of this phenomenon.

Environmental justice and Brownfields are inextricably linked; the inescapable context for examination of the Brownfields issue is environmental justice and urban revitalization. At the core of an environmental justice perspective is the recognition of the interconnectedness of the physical environment to the overall economic, social, human, and cultural/spiritual health of a community. The vision of environmental justice is the development of a paradigm to achieve socially equitable, environmentally healthy, economically secure, psychologically vital, spiritually whole, and ecologically sustainable communities. To this end, Brownfields redevelopment must be linked to help address this broader set of community needs and goals without creating new problems, such as displacement caused from selective revitalization. Brownfields initiatives and community planning should ensure the long-term survivability of existing communities.

Such an approach has important ramifications for the development of strategies, partnerships, models, and pilot projects. It requires a firm commitment toward achieving the goals of environmental justice and must involve the community as an equal partner. In addition, the approach must integrate activities of all federal agencies as well as their state, local, and tribal counterparts. Through these Public Dialogues, communities have articulated a highly compelling vision of the future that speaks to all levels of government. The recommendations that follow were developed within the framework of a number of overarching questions that emerged as the Subcommittee traveled across the nation and heard testimony from the participants in the Public Dialogues.

Recommendations have been grouped into three basic categories:

I. Public Participation and Community Vision

1. Informed and Empowered Community Involvement
2. Community Vision/Comprehensive Community Based Planning
3. Role and Participation of Youth

II. Key Issue Areas

4. Equal Protection
5. Public Health, Environmental Standards, and Liability
6. Job Creation, Training, and Career Development
7. Land Use

III. Public and Private Sector Partnerships

8. Community/Private Sector Partnerships
9. Local, State, Tribal, and Territorial Government
10. Federal Interagency Cooperation, Programmatic Integration, and Government Reinvention

Given the cross-cutting nature of the issues surrounding urban revitalization and Brownfields, these recommendations should be viewed as an integrative set. Each recommendation is an important and indispensable piece of the larger puzzle. Therefore, no single recommendation, nor a subset of recommendations, should be viewed in isolation from the others.

I. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND COMMUNITY VISION

1. Informed and Empowered Community Involvement

Early, ongoing, and meaningful public participation is a hallmark of sound public policy and decision making. This requires that those most directly impacted are capable of exercising effectively their prerogatives and obligations to provide public input. Hence, the Subcommittee believes that public participation is meaningless if it is not informed and empowered community involvement.

Issues typically worthy of government attention such as Brownfields are highly complex and pose real challenges to policy makers as to how to develop and master the tools, methodologies, frameworks, processes, and protocols necessary for effective and meaningful public participation. Such issues typically involve multiple communities, different cultures and languages, diverse stakeholders, time frames, multiple locations, a broad range of agencies and institutions, and other factors. More often than not, the issues involve conflicting interests, agendas, and value systems.

Typically these issues involve four elements: (1) facts are uncertain, (2) values are in dispute, (3) stakes are high, and (4) a decision is urgent. While an appropriate description of the many environmentally related issues facing society today, the environmental justice framework eloquently speaks to the need for meaningful public participation in the conduct of science and use of technology.

One key element of ensuring informed and empowered community involvement is that this participation must be early and meaningful--taking place "up front"--not an after-thought. Participants at the Public Dialogues stressed a new power relationship within which communities are an integral part of the decision-making process "from beginning to end." Unfortunately, too often communities are consulted only after a decision has been made. Too often, government response to community questions results in their operating in a "decide, adapt, and defend" mode. The community is inherently qualified to be "at the table" during discussions about matters which affect them. Moreover, several participants cautioned that just because a person was at the table does not necessarily mean they are part of the decision-making process. For example, grant proposals often create the impression that community groups are more involved in the development of a project proposal than is actually the case. This becomes a source of friction and distrust.

Government officials should be accountable for not only providing opportunities for public input, but in making a good faith effort to succeed in securing public input, it is not enough to simply hold a meeting or provide opportunities for access. It should be noted that Native American tribes are governmental entities--as such, the tribal members of tribal governments should be included in all public participation and outreach activities.

"If there is any hope of revitalizing our urban communities, we have to begin with revitalizing the participation of the citizenry. We know that apathy is rampant, especially in economically disadvantaged communities. But for us to build sustainable communities, we must take the time to cut through the apathy. It will take time because people of color and low income communities are not just disenfranchised economically; we are disenfranchised psychologically because we have witnessed a history of being locked out of the decision-making process."

Connie Tucker
Southern Organizing Committee for
Social and Economic Justice
Atlanta, GA, Public Dialogue

"I was struck by the vivid separation of the revitalization theme from the more common basis for cleanup and reuse for purposes of redevelopment. I found this to be an incisive and important distinction to make, as it provides the logical justification for the report's emphasis on community participation throughout the revitalization process. If the purpose is only redevelopment, then it can be handled as business as usual, and there is little need for public participation besides that required by law (for example, zoning or permit decisions). It is very important to be upfront and direct with this distinction."

Tom Kennedy
Association of State and Territorial
Solid Waste Management Officials

Meaningful participation is different in many ways from holding public meetings or getting letters of support. Participants noted that:

- Ongoing stakeholder involvement is the only way to ensure that the affected community can influence technical and economic decisions.
- The community brings a wealth of site-specific knowledge to the table. Ongoing mechanisms such as advisory boards allow participants to get beyond posturing and to work together cooperatively.
- Upfront community involvement reduces the likelihood that political or legal action will block projects down the road.

It is not enough to provide access to information or opportunities to provide comment. Decision-makers must make an effort to truly consider the advice offered by the community. It is important that these decision-makers not only provide opportunities for affected communities to provide advice, but demonstrate that they are "hearing" the advice offered. Admittedly, decisions that may be selected may not agree with the recommendations offered; however, the best way to build credibility with the affected community is to show that it is seriously considering its advice.

With respect to public participation and the EPA Brownfields Initiative, there is typically much confusion around the fact that EPA's grants must go to a state, local, or tribal government. Community groups with an interest in a local Brownfields site thus may waste much time and energy because they are unaware that they need to develop strategies and build partnerships to ensure public accountability on the part of local officials and enhance the local Brownfields proposals. Most important, many community residents have both the desire to assist the city and much knowledge to offer, but lack resources and information to participate fully.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS:

1-1. *Support sustained and structured public dialogue on Brownfields and environmental justice on all levels.*

The Subcommittee appreciates EPA's realization of the need for and its commitment to a systematic and sustained national dialogue on Brownfields and environmental justice. Such a commitment requires some structured mechanisms (such as community advisory boards) for communities to engage EPA, government and other stakeholders, around their concerns. In this case, NEJAC developed its Public Participation Model upon which the Public Dialogues were modeled. Other mechanisms--on national, regional, and local levels--must be created and supported. In addition to traditional areas of public participation (such as planning and the oversight of cleanup) the public should play a role in the review of research projects, and the development of grant proposals.

1-2. *Develop efforts to empower stakeholders through information and education. Conduct the Brownfields program in ways which offer a real sense of hope.*

Public Dialogue participants indicated that many residents of impacted communities do not participate due to despair, apathy, lack of time and resources, or because they have just given up. In addition to specific recommendations to ensure better access, ranging from holding meetings at convenient times and accessible places to use of non-traditional outreach methods, the Subcommittee also emphasizes the need for government to foster encouragement and a sense of hope that is based upon results. In addition to participation in the decision-making process, residents must also participate in any social, environmental, and economic benefits that results from decisions. The education process also must include ways to provide communities with enough tools and information so they understand they can influence the political process beyond existing mechanisms.

1-3. Undertake special outreach efforts to overlooked groups.

Even programs that are targeted to communities of color still overlook key sectors of impacted communities. Examples cited during the Public Dialogues include Laotian Americans in Richmond, California; Arab-Americans in Detroit, Michigan; and Native Americans in various urban areas. At the same time, each of these groups has unique historical and cultural circumstances which must be considered.

1. ACTION ITEMS

- ☐ 1a. Institute policies and performance measures which encourage program personnel and policy makers to spend substantive time in neighborhoods as a regular part of their work so that there is understanding of real problems, concerns, and aspirations of community residents.
- ☐ 1b. Define "community" at each site in a way that is inclusive but gives priority to people who live or work closest to a site and/or are most directly impacted by activities at the site.
- ☐ 1c. Implement mechanisms and structures through which the community can take part in reviewing and evaluating progress.
- ☐ 1d. Institute ways to improve the public's access to information on urban revitalization/Brownfields, including:
 - Support the establishment of "storefront" type clearinghouses and repositories of Brownfields information in impacted communities for open access to information and create atmosphere for ongoing dialogue and planning (a good example is the Brownfields pilot project in Northhampton County/Cape Charles, Virginia)
 - Hold meetings at convenient times and locations
 - Provide day care and translation
 - Utilize innovative and non-traditional outreach methods such as school programs, posters, advertisements in local papers, community newsletters, and electronic mail
 - Build upon existing social and cultural networks such as schools, churches, and civic organizations
- ☐ 1e. Institute procedures and protocols to verify demonstrable partnerships with community-based groups in project proposals. Prospective grants and other support to city, state, and tribal governments should contain specific agreed language regarding, and be adequately funded to support, continuing public participation, such as the establishment of community advisory boards made up of people most impacted by Brownfields sites.
- ☐ 1f. Conduct an inventory of the language resources available for serving potentially-impacted communities.
- ☐ 1g. Convene a summit meeting of all stakeholders working on or affected by Brownfields projects as an opportunity to bring together all parties to discuss critical issues, craft unified strategies, and determine actions for follow-up.

2. Community Vision/Comprehensive Community-Based Planning

There exists within local communities highly coherent, vibrant, and compelling visions for achieving healthy and sustainable communities. Such visions, particularly in people of color, low income, indigenous peoples, and otherwise marginalized communities, emerge from a long history of grassroots efforts to be self-defined, self-directed, self-empowered, self-controlled, self-sufficient, and self-determined. Many communities already are engaging in highly successful planning and visioning processes. Government must acknowledge that these already exist.

Brownfields and all community revitalization efforts must be based upon such community visions. The capacity of local communities to identify and build upon the assets which ensure that a healthy and sustainable community, is an invaluable resource to the nation. These assets are economic, social, human, institutional, physical, natural, cultural, intellectual, and spiritual in nature.

Public Dialogue participants articulated the importance of developing holistic, multi-faceted, interactive, and integrative community-based planning models for Brownfields and urban revitalization. They view community-based planning as an alternative to the current dependence on developer-driven models that traditionally define the Brownfields problem in a narrow way. Community-based planning is a framework for identifying and solving problems. Instead of addressing problems piecemeal and then applying a "one-size fits all" solution, community-based planning has the flexibility to confront problems in the context of the region, the ecosystem, the city, or the neighborhood in which they occur.

In the eyes of the community, the Brownfields issue is more than the simple identification of contaminated sites and goes beyond the definitions created by developers. The community defines the problem from the vantage point of their aspirations. There was support for this premise from virtually all Public Dialogue participants, including representatives of the business community and lending institutions. Each realized that "if we're not addressing transportation, housing, education and training, and racism and other driving factors that have led to deindustrialization of our urban areas and loss of

"Periodically, societies need to create movements that stretch our humanity as we transform ourselves and our environment at the same time. It's been very exciting to be a part of such a movement. I will try to convey in a few words what is happening so that you can catch the spirit...I'm convinced that out of the devastation of Detroit, we are at the point here today where we can really redefine, rebuild, respirit, and recivilize the city. As you drive through Detroit, it's very easy to see the vacant lots and the abandoned buildings. What is harder to see behind the physical devastation is the new spirit that is arising in the city and finds its expression chiefly in the explosion of meetings that has taken place in the last year. There are meetings of hundreds and thousands of people, namely around the empowerment zone and the Land Use Task Force...But there are smaller meetings. For example, there's a group called Healthy Detroit, of which the Mayor is the honorary chair... Here in Detroit, we started by building a common vision."

Grace Boggs
Detroiteurs for Environmental Justice
Detroit, MI, Public Dialogue

"What would Detroit be like if there was a call to put major resources into economic self-reliance that would create economic livelihood opportunities in communities? A vision is what has been portrayed but has never been. It raises one's sights of what might be. It's inspiring and hopeful.... What would a new community-based economy look like? It must be real and tangible and immediate. I can see it, I can touch it, I can almost taste it..."

"If we ignore the development of an urban agricultural base in Detroit, we will miss the opportunity to really make Detroit a great city. In the 21st century, only those cities that develop a sound policy of such urban, social, and ecological developments will flourish. I believe that we will only move forward toward this future if we begin to adopt and integrate the Principles of Environmental Justice into our day-to-day fabric, and that's the future that I look forward to."

John Gruchala
Wayne County Community College
Detroit, MI, Public Dialogue

vitality, then addressing Brownfields, environmental contamination and liability alone will not be a significant benefit for people in the communities."

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS:

2-1. Base Brownfields pilots and other efforts upon coherent community visions which emerge from processes that have integrity within a community by ensuring opportunities for communities to articulate their own visions for "redefining, rebuilding, and respiriting" their communities.

Such visions must be comprehensive and address community revitalization, education, environmental cleanup and redevelopment, job creation and training, economic impacts, housing, and development of institutional infrastructures. Several participants at the Public Dialogues pointed to local efforts to build common visions that allow people from various backgrounds to come together and form a common vision that incorporates the needs of different sectors of the population.

2-2. Acknowledge community-based planning as a critical methodology for environmental protection and promote its use both inside and outside the Agency.

Several participants spoke about the need to develop tools that can be placed in the hands of community members which can help them to address issues related to environmental justice, community-based planning, and urban revitalization. They noted the importance of using such tools when forming a collective community vision. Participants pointed to numerous examples of community-based planning tools, including:

- ▶ South Bronx/NYC Ordinance 197A Planning Process (Vernice Miller-Northeast Environmental Justice Network)
- ▶ Southwest Detroit Environmental Vision Project (Ed Miller-Charles Stewart Mott Foundation)
- ▶ San Diego Toxic Free Neighborhoods Community Planning
- ▶ Guide (Diane Takvorian-Environmental Health Coalition)
- ▶ Pocket of Poverty Neighborhood Alliance Strategic Plan (Teresa Cordova-University of New Mexico at Albuquerque).

2-3. Support community-based efforts to link Brownfields projects to other redevelopment and community enhancement strategies such as "Empowerment Zones/Enterprise Communities, workforce development and job training, transportation infrastructure development, federal facility cleanup, and others.

Virtually every federal agency has at least one program that addresses urban revitalization. However, these programs are not coordinated and appear, to impacted communities, to be at cross-purposes. This link should be done both at the federal policy level and in the field.

2-4. Encourage revitalization strategies and redevelopment efforts which serve to support, enhance and protect a community's culture and history.

Such efforts should take into account both local and regional history. They should seek opportunities to build upon cultural resources and efforts at historical preservation as vehicles for economic development and enhancement of community-based assets.

2. ACTION ITEMS

- ☐ 2a. Compile an inventory of the resources available within the Agency (such as LAND VIEW II and other mapping programs) and outside of the Agency (such as an inventory of relevant extramural literature, experiences, experts, tools, and practicing institutions) as part of its community-based environmental protection efforts.
- ☐ 2b. Develop programs to provide to the community access to and training on the use of LAND VIEW II, geographic information systems (GIS) and other electronic mapping resources.
- ☐ 2c. Develop pilot programs for place-based coordination of Federal agency activities.
- ☐ 2d. Provide training opportunities to communities in the use of community-based planning techniques.
- ☐ 2e. Develop guidance for incorporation of community-based planning and community visioning into Community-Based Environmental Protection initiatives.
- ☐ 2f. Convene a national roundtable on strategies for application and development of GIS and community mapping tools.

3. *Role and Participation of Youth*

Young people provided great energy, creativity, and a sense of fresh vision to the Public Dialogues. During the meetings, they insisted on participating in all dialogues and decision-making processes. They made some of the most compelling presentations. For example, the Public Dialogues yielded perhaps no more thought provoking testimony than the account of a 5-year old African American boy's unsolicited remark in which he associated being black with living in burnt-out, empty, trash-filled neighborhoods.

Environmental justice seeks to address the functional link between living in degraded physical environments, mass alienation, and destructive violence. Offering a coherent way to impact this relationship will significantly benefit greatly those seeking to address violence, substance abuse, and related issues.

Many issues associated with Brownfields are profoundly related to the concerns of youth. The issues of healthy and sustainable communities are issues of a viable future. Government and social institutions have a moral obligation to ensure a world fit for all children--present and future. The youth are a precious resource which must be affirmed, supported, and nurtured.

Any discussion of Brownfields revitalization, to be successful, must involve the participation of the youth in urban areas where Brownfields dominate. These youths will eventually be the decision makers for their communities in the future. Therefore, to avoid making today's solutions tomorrow's dilemma for the youth, it is essential to get their input.

The youths living in Brownfields areas often are already familiar with these sites. While they may be unfamiliar with the term "Brownfields," they are aware of the opportunities presented by these sites. For example, in some inner-city neighborhoods youths utilize some of these sites to engage in urban wildlife preservation. They also can be found in many cities using Brownfields areas as sites where they raise pigeons as a hobby. The youths take on the responsibility for providing the nurturing environment these birds need to thrive. Such activities are akin to those of organizations that raise endangered species in captivity. In our attempts to involve youth in discussions about Brownfields revitalization, we can take advantage of the initiative demonstrated by these youth.

Additionally, meaningful employment and career prospects rank among the central questions facing young persons--in many ways defining young people's sense of identity and connectedness to society.

"We have to talk about a vision that comes from the community, but part of that community is young people. It can't just be in words alone. It really has to be about involving the young people into the process..."

"One of the young people who works with us, a brother, often says that the solutions of today end up being the problems of tomorrow. If young people are not sitting in on the process, are not involved in the dialogue--I can understand how the solutions for today will end up being the problems of tomorrow..."

"[Young people] must be part of revitalizing our urban inner cities. In so doing, we must look at building partnerships with elementary schools, high schools. I know here in Atlanta there are many schools which are built on top of landfills. Whether or not they are cleaned up, the history is there. How many of our children know that? How many of our parents actually know that? We must look at the psychological impact on young people today."

"When you look at the reality of lack of jobs, when you look at the question of jobs versus the environment, we hear that, as young people, we don't understand the dialogue that is taking place around being able to develop real jobs that affect our future so that our community can be truly sustainable."

"When you look at crime and violence in the communities, it is all linked. Yet what it comes down to is the reality of how to overcome these things. The psychological impact on young people growing up in urban American must be filtered into our public dialogue as we talk about revitalization."

Angela Brown
Youth Task Force
Atlanta, GA, Public Dialogue

These are issues which must be engaged at the earliest age possible. EPA and other government agencies must see it as their responsibility to work with young people to help present a message about meaningful career prospects that are relevant to them.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS:

3-1. Form the requisite partnerships both inside and outside of government to better understand and address urban revitalization/Brownfields issues of concern to youth.

3-2. Through the Brownfields initiative, integrate environmental activities and career development with targeted environmental justice and urban revitalization strategies.

A significant amount of resources and attention is devoted to engage young persons in the pursuit of careers related to the environmental. Environmental justice and urban revitalization create opportunities to make current educational programs more relevant by integrating study and action around issues related to "the place where we live, work, and play." Public education can be engaged in highly productive and compelling ways. EPA should partner with other agencies to support efforts by public schools, community colleges, public and private universities, and other educational institutions to integrate these issues.

Environmental justice and urban revitalization also offer opportunities to change the serious inadequacy of cultural diversity in EPA and professions related to the environment. Moreover, they allow for integration across disciplinary lines to make for career paths more relevant to the needs of the 21st century.

3-3. Expand environmental education opportunities for urban youth through urban environmental education centers.

YouthBuild

The YouthBuild program is an innovative and successful program that responds to two problems that pervade low-income communities: the need to reach out to at-risk youth and the shortage of safe, affordable housing. YouthBuild teaches low-income youth how to provide housing for their communities by engaging them in four mutually supportive areas:

- ▶ education
- ▶ employment training
- ▶ leadership development
- ▶ housing construction and rehabilitation

In the classroom, students receive both academic education and skills instruction. On the construction sites, with appropriate supervision, the students rehabilitate abandoned buildings in poor communities--creating affordable housing while gaining construction skills.

YouthBuild has received national recognition for its effectiveness in providing disadvantaged youth with direction and hope, while simultaneously addressing the need for affordable housing in low-income communities.

Revitalization of Brownfields sites also present the opportunity to expand the education for inner-city youth. These sites could be converted to urban environmental education centers that could serve as a mechanism through which youth could engage in environmental educational activities. Since Brownfields sites are the result of past environmental practices, these centers could focus on activities that promote the long-term sustainability of cities, and in turn, of the sites themselves. Experiential education programs take youth from urban areas to camps outside the city to train them on team building activities. The environmental education centers could assume the function of these experiential programs directly in the neighborhoods in which the youth live. Such a change also allows for a curriculum that focuses on issues (such as environmental justice) that these youths face on a daily basis. These centers also increase the possibility that any solutions adopted for Brownfields revitalization today will be long-term or permanent. By incorporating youth ideas and initiatives now, we reduce the possibility that these youths, when they become adults will fundamentally alter initiatives and solutions we adopt now.

3-4. Provide support for youth-led projects.

One proposed method to involve youth is through the YouthBuild program. Because YouthBuild is a national organization with sites in most major cities, it provides an opportunity to solicit ideas from, and the involvement of a core group of youth nationwide. Another noteworthy example is *Commencement 2000*, an environmental education urban forestry project in Oakland, California initiated by the U.S. Forest Service.

3-5. Establish mechanisms which enhance multi-generational partnerships, particularly supporting the establishment and maintenance of youth mentoring networks--both formal and informal.

3. ACTION ITEMS

- ☐ 3a. Designate "youth" as a formal stakeholder category for federal advisory committees and other multi-stakeholder public participation processes.
- ☐ 3b. Support efforts to develop youth mapping and planning projects, such as Kids City in Cleveland Ohio.
- ☐ 3c. Conduct a conference on youth concerns and needs around urban revitalization/Brownfields.
- ☐ 3d. Work with the U.S. Department of Education to develop educational programs around urban revitalization and Brownfields which can be used in public schools.
- ☐ 3e. Review current environmental education programs to ensure that they address environmental justice, urban revitalization, and job training, and career development concerns.